

# EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

APRIL 1998

## Statewide mutual aid agreement takes shape

**A**n agreement sealed with a handshake doesn't always hold up in a court of law today. But agreements are vital, particularly in emergency services. Mutual aid agreements between various localities and organizations are in place around the state and help enhance response capabilities and resources.

To merge and broaden these pools of resources while providing protection against related liability issues, the Statewide Mutual Aid Committee has been working for about a year and a half to develop a Statewide Mutual Aid Agreement.

"The purpose is to give folks the legal authority and coverage to go anywhere in the Commonwealth and assist in any area of the response," said Selby Jacobs, committee chairman. "This agreement will give us not only the legal coverage, but the authority to move resources

from Northern Virginia to Tidewater, for example."

The concept originated in a meeting of the State Fire Chiefs Association, when Jacobs brought up a concern he had held for some time. "I felt we needed to get beyond the 'handshake' agreements that



exist in most places in the state, particularly between volunteer fire departments," said Jacobs. "The committee's focus in the beginning was just fire and rescue. As we began to develop this concept, we started to look at it from a broader perspective and asked ourselves 'When would this kind of agreement come into play?'"

One answer fit the bill: a mutual aid agreement would be needed during any kind of disaster or emergency. The biggest challenge from this point, said Jacobs, "was identifying and getting to the table all of the groups necessary to get this thing going."

The committee has recently finished developing an initial draft of the agreement that is being reviewed by the State Attorney General's Office, the Departments of Emergency Services and Planning and Budget, and the Division of Risk Management within the Department of General Services. The draft includes the following points:

- ◆ Both local and state resources, such as regional hazmat teams, are embraced under the agreement;
- ◆ There is no provision for reimburse-

ment. The locality that provides the aid pays for deployment and maintenance;

- ◆ The agreement is primarily designed for cities and counties, although all types of federal, state and local government organizations are eligible to participate. For example, public service authorities and military bases are eligible.

- ◆ Local organizations and agencies, such as fire departments and rescue squads, participate through their jurisdictions. Existing mutual aid agreements remain effective between these groups, but would be incorporated into and operate under the more comprehensive statewide mutual aid agreement guidelines.

- ◆ The agreement could be used under circumstances ranging from small incidents to presidentially declared disasters.

- ◆ The locality providing the assistance retains direct control of its people, resources and equipment. Responsibilities also include providing for general liability, vehicle liability and worker's compensation coverage to the standard outlined in the agreement.

Participating in the agreement involves three steps. Localities sign a "Basic Agreement" that verifies they have appropriate insurance coverage. Adjacent cities and counties are encouraged to prepare a two-party "Secondary" *(continued on page 2)*

### The Statewide Mutual Aid Agreement committee is a diverse group that includes:

State Fire Chiefs Association of Virginia, Virginia Department of Fire Programs, Virginia Professional Firefighters Union, Virginia State Firefighters Association, Virginia Association of Counties, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia Sheriffs Association, Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, Virginia Department of Emergency Services, Virginia Emergency Management Association, Virginia Search and Rescue Council, Virginia Association of Hazardous Materials Response Specialists, Office of Emergency Medical Services, Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads and the Virginia Department of Forestry.

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# Consistency is key in educating the public

**T**he conundrum faced by most emergency services managers when reaching out to the public is how to effectively motivate people to prepare for disasters. Experienced National American Red Cross public educator Rocky Lopes offered some practical techniques in a past *NCCEM Bulletin* newsletter article.

He suggested making sure disaster preparedness messages are consistent. Lopes pointed out research shows people will take the “easiest” or less costly option if they are provided with a selection of preparedness actions to take, even if the action is incorrect. An organization’s credibility is at stake when inconsistent or contradictory messages are given.

For example, hurricane preparedness messages have offered conflicting instructions on protecting windows. People have been told to tape windows or to shutter them with boards. Between these two preparedness actions, people will choose to tape their windows — the incorrect, but less expensive step to take.

Lopes observed that “universal” preparedness messages are rare. The most effective strategy is to tailor your

preparedness message to the intended audience. For example, when persuading senior citizens to prepare disaster supplies kits, you may want to keep in mind that many members in this audience could have financial and physical limitations.

A different approach is needed to reach children as well. Lopes suggested matching the appropriate messages and materials to the group with which you want to communicate.

Relying on dramatic and negative messages, such as graphic descriptions and images of disaster-related destruction, can encourage denial. Lopes said research shows that using these types of approaches may heighten denial because people do not want to think about what they saw. They may also hold negative feelings toward the spokesperson and his or her organization.

While some “don’t” messages are appropriate, such as “don’t drive around a flood barrier,” providing positive, directive information works better. When

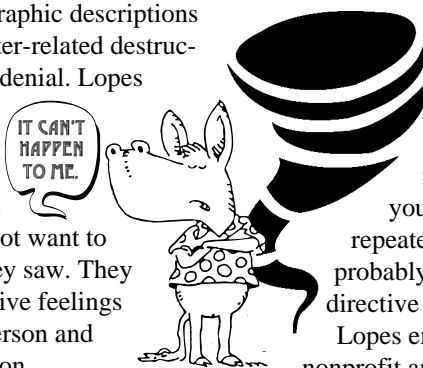
motivating people to both prepare for a disaster and take the right actions during a disaster, telling them what they need to do is far more effective.

People will tend to follow simple, organized steps to disaster preparedness. Most importantly, Lopes emphasized, the message needs to start from the level of awareness about disasters that exists in the community. If the people in your area have not been hit by a hurricane recently, you may need to begin by demonstrating

that such an event can happen and what could occur as a result.

Provide examples and build your preparedness message from that point. If you live in a community that is repeatedly flooded, your public is probably ready for more detailed and directive preparedness instruction.

Lopes encouraged all of the public, nonprofit and private-sector organizations involved in public education for disaster preparedness to “work together to educate people consistently, frequently, and through varied methods.”



## Range of issues covered

**I**f you’ve wondered whether your locality is prepared to deal with mass fatalities, you may find the answers to many of your questions in Williamsburg. From April 30-May 3, the city plays host to the National Foundation for Mortuary Care and its 1998 Annual Conference and Meeting.

The foundation is a nonprofit, charitable organization dealing exclusively with mass fatality incident readiness and response. This year’s conference focuses on the roles played by government, volunteers and supporting organizations in a mass fatalities incident.

Topics cover response operations and procedures, the

Incident Command System, roles of responding agencies, communication problems in a multi-agency response, handling fatalities that are chemically or biologically contaminated and more.

“With the mass fatality incidents that have occurred in this country, there is an important need for our emergency managers at all levels of government to learn who their partners are in planning and response,” said Tom Rexrode, the organization’s executive director.

For information, call Tom Rexrode at 757/258-4504, e-mail: [nfmc@erols.com](mailto:nfmc@erols.com)

## Statewide mutual aid

(continued from page 1)

Agreement” that details how the mutual aid will be implemented and identifies the official authorized to approve the request. Finally, a “Contractual Agreement” is developed for the actual emergency that formalizes the process of requesting or providing assistance.

Chesterfield’s Emergency Services Coordinator and committee member Lynda Furr said, “The big problem emergency management has is there are never enough resources available in a disaster. What this mutual aid agreement will do is make more resources available and make them available statewide.”

At this point, the committee is ironing out legal issues related to liability and making sure the agreement is in line with federal, state and local laws and statutes. Obtaining the approval of local government is the next step. The Virginia Municipal League and the Virginia Association of Counties will work with local elected officials and district attorneys to address concerns related to the agreement.

Observing that loss of life and damage to property could be minimized under the agreement, Furr observed, “The more quickly resources can be deployed in a disaster, the less it could cost local government in the long run.”

For more information, call Selby Jacobs at 804/371-7070, E-mail: [sjacobs@dhcd.state.va.us](mailto:sjacobs@dhcd.state.va.us)

# HAZ MAT



## Terrorism training classes offered

by Brett Burdick, VDES Terrorism Program Manager

**T**errorism in Virginia is a credible threat as recent events have illustrated. Terrorist incidents using weapons of mass destruction have occurred throughout the nation. All communities, whether they include potential terrorist targets within their borders or they lie along transportation routes, are vulnerable.

The brunt of managing the initial consequences of a terrorist incident is borne by local first responders such as emergency



medical services, police and fire services people. First on the scene, local responders will be required to identify that a terrorist incident has occurred. They will have to operate in this terrorist environment for several hours before supporting federal and state assets arrive in sufficient numbers to make a difference.

Since 1995, the VDES Technological Hazards Division has developed and delivered a range of terrorism

training for federal, state and local groups. Courses have been designed for first responders and middle and upper managers in law enforcement and fire services who would be incident commanders during a terrorist event.

The courses for first responders are: *Public Safety Response to Terrorism* and *Emergency Response to Terrorism - Basic Concepts*. Both provide fundamental information vital to first responders such as how to recognize a terrorist incident, initiate self-protective actions, isolate the incident area, deny entry to the incident site and render aid to victims of a terrorist act.

The course for incident commanders is titled *Public Safety Response to Terrorism - Management Considerations*. In this class, incident commanders deal with issues of resources control, legal authority, and state and federal agency coordination.

This year, selected communities in the state will be augmenting their terrorism training through the national Domestic Preparedness (DP) Program. Administered by the U.S. Army Chemical and Biological Defense Command, this program is providing training to 127 cities and counties across the country. The participating communities in Virginia include Arlington County and the cities of Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Chesapeake, Newport News and Richmond.

For more information about the DP Program and the Tech Haz terrorism training, or for a presentation of one of the Tech Haz terrorism classes, call Ron Hargrave at 804/897-6573.

## IFLOWS program manager named

**T**he IFLOWS ship at VDES has a new captain. In February, Steve Billcheck officially came on board as program manager after working with Stan Campbell, former program manager, since the early 1980s. "I worked with Stan almost from the beginning of IFLOWS," said Billcheck. "When I started, there were just three pilot counties in Virginia with IFLOWS installed."

Billcheck has a solid background in water resources/hydrology and weather technology. Prior to his tenure with Campbell, he worked over 11 years with the Water Control Board which is now the Department of Environmental Quality.

He moved to the National Weather Service office in Richmond as their hydrologist and worked on the IFLOWS program during his four years there. Billcheck's most recent position was with the Department of Conservation and Recreation as a floodplain engineer.

"Right now, we're upgrading the IFLOWS hardware and software to the Windows 95

platform and replacing and upgrading monitoring equipment as needed," said Billcheck.

He described future projects for the program. "Three or four years ago, IFLOWS started putting gauges on soil and conservation district dams and I think we'll be increasing the use of IFLOWS monitoring capabilities on dam sites," he said.

Billcheck also wants to use IFLOWS to do more stage forecasting. "We can use the technology so that the computer can come up with forecasting information on flash flood stages in the smaller streams," he said.

About the value of the IFLOWS, Billcheck commented, "The data gives emergency managers a handle on what's happening with the watersheds in their area. They get vital information and can make more timely and effective decisions regarding warning and evacuation for flash floods."

For information on the IFLOWS program, call Steve Billcheck at 804/674-2405.

## Communications conference

Get a firsthand look at the latest in communication technology and attend workshops dealing with regulations, ethics, team motivation, supervisory skills, project management and other relevant topics.

The Association of Public Safety Communications Officers is sponsoring the 25th Annual East Coast Regional Conference, May 18-20, at Virginia Beach. You'll get a conference program that deals with the nuts and bolts of communications operations as well as related management issues. Register by April 15 to receive a discount on the registration fee.

Broaden your knowledge of the challenges facing communications today. For more information, or to register, call Terri Walker at 757/441-5600.

# Training Calendar



## Operations Division

### **EOC Management and Operations**

April 14-16  
Richmond

### **Emergency Action Plans for Dams**

April 15  
Loudoun County

### **Instructional Presentation Skills**

April 21-23  
Fairfax

### **Exercise Design**

April 27-28  
Lynchburg

### **Reservist Training: Disaster Field Office Orientation and Federal Response Plan Overview**

April 28  
Richmond

### **Reservist Training: Disaster Field Office Orientation and Federal Response Plan Overview**

April 29  
Roanoke

### **Developing Volunteer Resources**

April 29-30  
Abingdon

### **Hazardous Weather and Flood Preparedness**

May 5-7  
Harrisonburg

### **ICS/EOC Interface**

May 6-7  
Waynesboro

### **EIS Sustainment Training**

May 7 and 22  
Richmond

### **Coordinator's Briefing**

May 13-14  
Culpeper

### **Disaster Response and Recovery Operations**

May 18-20  
Manassas

### **Hazardous Weather and Flood Preparedness**

June 2-4  
Salem

### **Coordinator's Briefing**

June 10-11  
Chesapeake

### **Introduction to Emergency Management**

June 17-19  
Rockingham County

### **Reservist Training: Disaster Field Office Orientation and Federal Response Plan Overview**

June 23  
Roanoke

### **Basic PIO and Media Relations Workshop**

June 24  
Waynesboro

For information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/897-6559

## Technological Hazards Division

### **Advanced Hazardous Materials Control**

May 11-15  
Martinsville  
For information, call the VDES Tech Haz Division at 804/897-6573

### Search and Rescue

### **Managing Search Operations**

April 17-19 (Part II)  
Shenandoah County

### **Basic Airscent Dog Team Workshop**

April 16-17  
Location to be decided

### **SAR Council**

April 25  
Richmond  
For information, call Winnie Pennington at 804/674-2422

## Conferences

### **National Hurricane Conference**

April 6-10  
Norfolk  
For information, call Jim Talbot at 757/441-5600

### **1998 Annual Conference on Technology in Emergency Management**

April 21-24, 1998  
Virginia Beach  
For information, call Mark Pennington at 804/897-6532

In conjunction with this conference, the following course is offered:

### **Cameo Workshop**

April 21  
For information, call George Roarty at 804/897-6574

### **Association of Public Safety Communications Officials East Coast Regional Conference**

May 17-12  
Virginia Beach  
For information, call Terri Walker at 757/441-5600

### **Virginia Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Conference**

May 29-31  
Virginia Beach  
For information, call Gary Brown at 804/371-3500

### **National Search and Rescue Annual Conference**

May 27-30  
Portland, Oregon  
For information, call Mylea Wade at 703/222-6277

### **Public Safety Educators' Conference**

August 7-9  
Richmond  
For information, call Carolyn Sanford at 804/861-0263

### **1998 Hazardous Materials Conference**

September 24-26  
Virginia Beach  
For information, call 757/491-2800



10501 Trade Court  
Richmond, VA 23236-3713

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State Coordinator...Addison E. Slayton  
Information Director...Michael J. La Civita  
Executive Editor...Janet L. Clements  
Managing Editor...Jo A. Hoots

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